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Pathways TO Less Stress

Stress is a normal part of life. Everyone copes with it differently, and day-to-day stresses are as varied as the people who experience them. Even happy events, such as a holiday event, can be stressful.

Relationships, outlook, sleep, productivity and general health all can suffer from prolonged stress.

Does each day leave you feeling overwhelmed? Here are 3 practical ways to lower the stress and increase happiness now:

Save some energy for pleasure. Be social – peers can offer much-needed support and empathy. Volunteer – being gracious and helping people nurtures your spirit. Create – using your talents and pursuing new activities can make life a little sweeter.

Take care of you. Exercise – it makes you stronger and relieves tension. Rest – lack of sleep not only tires you, it makes you irritable and moody. Eat nutritious meals – this may be something easy to forget when you're busy, but eating well-balanced meals boosts energy and mood to help you see the brighter side.

Find a way to cope. Whether your stress is triggered by a life-changing event or everyday pressure, work on solutions to reduce worrying; writing down your thoughts in a journal can help.

If life seems out of control, you're not alone. Seek guidance from a trusted counselor, who can help sort things out and offer new, positive directions.

How are you doing?

The August 2009 Gallup Healthways Well-Being Index (most current results at press time) found 51% of Americans feel they are thriving, while 45% say they are still struggling. This was the fourth straight month more Americans considered themselves thriving rather than struggling.

Sources:

"2009 Mental Health Month: Life Your Life Well." Mental Health America, 2009. Accessed on 7/31/09 at <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/may>.

"Stress Management." Medline Plus, 2/6/08. Accessed on 7/30/09 at <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001942.htm>.

"Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index: Life Evaluation Trend." Gallup, 2009. Accessed on 7/31/09 at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/118393/Thriving-Eclipses-Struggling-First-Time-Early-08.aspx?CSTS=tagrss>.

BEST BITS

For weary shoppers: Take a break from shopping to sit down for lunch. A healthy, enjoyable meal will revive your spirits. Also, to get more mileage out of your feet and reduce fatigue, wear your most supportive, comfortable shoes.

Bundles of nutrition: Yummy sweet potatoes have a moist orange flesh that is quite sweet. They are bursting with vitamins A and C, minerals, fiber and flavor. They're delicious served baked and steaming hot in their jackets and are often served at traditional holiday feasts.

Source: PB 12.00.7

No texting while driving. More than a third of U.S. teenagers admit text messaging is the biggest distraction while driving, finds a survey of 900 students by SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) and Liberty Mutual Insurance Group. Several states now prohibit texting while driving, with legislation being considered in Virginia, Arkansas and Rhode Island as well as major U.S. cities, including Philadelphia, Detroit and Phoenix.

Source:

(From TS 10.09)

"Cellphones and Driving. Insurance Information Institute, 2009. Accessed 5/18/09 at <http://www.iii.org/media/hottopics/insurance/cellphones/>.

Safety tip for harsh winter conditions: Carry a supply of large plastic garbage bags for a variety of uses, such as a ground cover while chaining up tires or for keeping your body warmer and drier. – From Mary Hollins, Personal Best safety and risk management consultant.

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SPECIAL REPORT

QuikQuiz:

Relaxation Techniques

Can your mental state make you sick? Can healing your mind heal your body? Civilizations have been exploring these questions for centuries. To see what science has learned, take the quiz. Relax, it's easy.

1. Because the mind and body share the same systems – nervous, circulatory, endocrine and immune – the well-being of one often affects the other.

True False

2. In addition to emotional triggers, stress can result from physiological effects, including:

- a. prolonged heavy exercise
- b. infection, pain or shock
- c. sleep deprivation
- d. all of the above

3. Studies show relaxation techniques and other mind-body interventions can:

- a. reduce pain
- b. improve blood pressure
- c. relieve asthma and irritable bowel syndrome
- d. all of the above

4. Yoga incorporates both martial arts and meditation to produce relaxation.

True False

5. Meditation requires you to lie down to focus on your thoughts.

True False

ANSWERS

1. *True*. Modern studies show therapeutic mind-body techniques can treat a range of physiological disorders, often in combination with conventional medical care. These interventions represent an expanding field of medicine.

2. *d* – Any environmental demand or pressure that causes mental, physical or behavioral symptoms may be called the stress response. You can control it with the relaxation response using various techniques such as progressive muscle relaxation, tai chi, yoga and meditation.

3. *d* – The controlled breathing and focus during mind-body exercises produce a calming and energizing antidote to chronic stress and negative thought patterns that lead to health problems.

4. *False* – Tai chi uses a combination of breathing and martial arts; yoga uses meditation, breathing and various forms of physical exercise. Yoga generally concentrates on producing a relaxation effect especially designed for stress relief.

5. *False* – The best posture for meditation is to sit comfortably with your spine erect and eyes closed. Focus on thoughts, breathing and other sensations that arise during each session to keep you in the present and free of intrusive, distracting worries.

Walking and Meditating? Yes, this form of meditation focuses on the physical sensations of each step you take – your feet touching the ground, the rhythm of your breathing while moving, and feeling the air on your face. You don't zone out, but the forced concentration on your movement takes effort, which can reduce stress by detracting from tension and anxiety. Walk away from stress today.

Sources:

"The Harvard Medical School Guide to Relieving Stress." Harvard Health Publications. Excerpted from "Stress Control: Techniques for Preventing and Easing Stress." President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2002.

"Your portable guide to stress relief." Harvard Health Publications, Harvard Medical School, 2009. Accessed 8/4/09 at https://www.health.harvard.edu/web_premiums/your-portable-guide-to-stress-relief.htm.

Schedule a relaxation escape once a day – preferably for 20-30 minutes, especially during stressful times. You may find it's most effective at the end of your work day or before bedtime – or whenever you most need the tension release.

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FITNESS GUIDELINES

Give The Gift of Fitness

For gifts that say you care, think fitness – whether the recipient is young or not, a dedicated athlete or casual walker. Get shopping with these ideas;

Pedometer – your favorite walker can use this handy gadget to reach the recommended goal of 10,000 steps a day.

Diet and exercise journal – Tracking food and activity is a winning tool for weight watchers.

Workout clothing – rain, sun or snow, suitable attire makes exercise more comfortable.

Exercise bands or tubes – great for travelers or at-home exercisers who don't have a lot of room at home.

Dumbbells – choose from a wide variety of colors and weights.

Workout gloves – protect hands from weights.

Sports bag – from fashionable to no-nonsense, and always useful.

Stainless steel or aluminum water bottle – available in fun colors, sizes and designs for every taste.

Lessons – for yoga, tennis, golf, dancing – you name it, there's a class for everyone on your list.

Eye protection – swim goggles, safety glasses.

Helmets – sporty, lightweight protection for skating, biking or skiing.

Backpack – for the hikers on your list.

Exercise mat – great for Pilates, stretching or yoga.

Exercise DVD – for folks who like to work out at home or can't afford a health club.

No matter what you choose, a gift that raises health awareness is a gift that can last a lifetime.

Sources:

Lynn Bode. "Give the Gift of Fitness." AFPA, 2009. Accessed 8/4/09 at <http://www.afpafitness.com/articles/articles-and-newsletters/research-articles-index/exercise-program-design/give-the-gift-of-fitness/>.

Jean Lawrence. "Give the Gift of Health." WebMD, 10/15/04. Accessed 8/4/09 at <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=51938>.

"ACE Says the Hottest Holiday Gifts Inspire Fitness." ACE, 11/16/05. Accessed 8/4/09 at http://www.acefitness.org/media/media_display.aspx?itemid=242.

Staying Active in the Cold

Don't hibernate in winter – outdoor exercise prevents cabin fever, pumps up your energy on gloomy days and may boost your immunity during flu season. Have healthy fun in the cold with a little preparation:

- **Check with your provider first** if you have heart disease, asthma or another condition that may be aggravated by cold weather physical activity.
- **Dress in layers.** Wear moisture-wicking polypropylene, fleece or wool for insulation and a waterproof, breathable outer layer. Remove or replace layers as needed.
- **Wear a warm hat and gloves,** and if you have respiratory or cardiac concerns, wear a scarf over your mouth.
- **Stay visible after dark.** Wear light-colored or reflective clothing, and clip on a flashing light.
- **Choose footwear with good traction to avoid slips.** Avoid slippery sidewalks and roadways.
- **Use sunscreen and sunglasses** to reduce UV rays and glare. You can get a sunburn even on cloudy, cold days.
- **Watch the wind chill factor** and consider staying indoors when it's 0° F or below.
- **Stay hydrated.** Drink one or two cups of water before exercising. Carry a water bottle and drink every 20 minutes if you are exercising vigorously.
- **Don't go it alone:** Exercise with a buddy or let someone know when you'll return.

Avoid frostbite and hypothermia. If you notice pain, numbness,

tingling or skin whitening – usually on the face, fingers or toes – get out of the cold immediately. **First aid:** Slowly warm the area without rubbing. If hypothermia symptoms occur – intense shivering, slurred speech, loss of coordination and fatigue – seek emergency help.

Sources:

“Exercise and Cold Weather: Stay Motivated, Fit and Safe.” Mayo Clinic, 11/1/08. Accessed 6/14/09 at <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/fitness/HQ01681>.

“All Weather Workouts.” Consumer Reports. 12/21/05. Accessed 6/14/09 at http://www.consumerreports.org/health/free-highlights/manage-your-health/all_weather_workouts.htm?AFFID=HNARSIC5.

GOAL LINE: Talk-sing test: If you can’t talk easily while exercising, you’re working too hard. If you can sing, you may not be exercising hard enough.

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WORK/LIFE BALANCE

Time & Task Management

Is lack of organization causing you lost time and frustration?

That can often lead to stress. Getting more organized is a smart way to find more time. By some estimates, every hour you spend planning can give you 3-4 hours back. Think about how that extra time cushion could ease the squeeze and reduce stress in your daily life.

TEST: Are you a time-saver? Circle the habits that apply to your work style.

1. I avoid multitasking so I can focus more effectively on one thing at a time.
2. I always seem to be juggling several activities at once.
3. I designate distraction-free work periods for priority tasks.
4. I often run out of time to complete major tasks due to interruptions.

5. I delegate tasks to avoid over-commitment.
6. I have a hard time delegating tasks when I need help.
7. I maintain a visual to-do list to track my time, deadlines and appointments.
8. I often misjudge the time needed to complete tasks.
9. I use set periods to address email and other communications all at once.
10. I often get bogged down with continuous email, phone calls and meetings.
11. I check in with my supervisor and co-workers regularly for progress reports and feedback.
12. I am often too busy to stay connected with my co-workers.
13. I create routines, such as clearing my work space, at the start and end of each day.

Results: The odd-numbered statements represent a style of task management that can help you get organized, save time, and stay sane.

3 ACTION ITEMS:

Identify and write down your personal time wasters, such as searching for stuff, long e-mail replies or chit-chat. Eliminate one per week. Tabulate the time you gained without it, and choose how you'll use the new-found time – before it slips away.

Take a time-management course. Check with your company employee assistance program or search local education outreach options, such as a community college.

Get adequate sleep. Feeling rested and strong physically can significantly improve your focus and efficiency so you get more done in less time. Everything is easier when you get your rest.

Source: Mind Your Stress/How To Cope and Regain Your Life. Oakstone Publishing, LLC dba Personal Best. 2009.

That's the Spirit! You can lighten up your holidays.

Does the holiday hoopla bring out the Scrooge in you? *Ba humbug.* Whether or not you're looking forward to the merry-making, a fresh approach might boost your spirits this season.

Forget hosting a perfect party or finding the perfect gifts. Who needs the pressure? *Instead, focus on doing less and enjoying more.* Here are some simple ways to meet your physical and spiritual needs for a holiday that celebrates who you are:

Take charge of your traditions. Break with holiday habits that no longer inspire you, or choose new ones, especially if your finances or surroundings have changed.

People who find the most pleasure in the holidays are those who commit to personal choices about how they're going to spend this time. Skip the lavish meals and multiple gatherings unless they're what you want. Avoid people and activities that trigger negative feelings. Don't compare yourself or your family to others.

Try a different approach to gift giving. With so many on tight budgets these days, a little creativity can stretch your dollars a long way. *Examples:* Give parents a "gift certificate" for one night of babysitting, or yard work for an elderly relative. Get crafty and make your gifts – a favorite-recipe book, DVD photo album or a package of homemade holiday treats.

Holidays can be particularly rough if you have a drug, alcohol or eating problem. Stay in contact with a friend who understands, attend a support group, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, and avoid situations that may trigger unhealthy habits.

Taking time to relax and exercise can keep you focused on your personal goals. Just knowing you have choices can relieve tension and brighten the holidays.

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SELF CARE

Stomach Upset?

Indigestion is a common stomach complaint and a daily occurrence for some people. The usual symptoms are upper abdominal fullness and discomfort, and sometimes burping, bloating, burning, gas or nausea.

Most indigestion is caused by what we swallow. Common triggers

include: eating too much, too fast or too close to bedtime; excess fatty foods; alcohol; coffee; carbonated drinks; pain relievers and other medications.

Try to identify the culprits and practice moderation. Knowing what upsets your digestive tract can help you protect it and avoid that uncomfortable feeling down under.

You can find relief from the symptoms of indigestion with over-the-counter antacids and remedies for gas, nausea and diarrhea.

You can also learn practical prevention:

- Eat several small meals throughout the day; eat slowly.
- Don't smoke.
- Avoid coffee, carbonated beverages and alcohol.
- Avoid medications that may irritate the stomach lining, such as aspirin or anti-inflammatory drugs (review these needs with your provider).
- Find ways to decrease emotional stress, such as relaxation therapy or yoga. Get enough rest and exercise.

See your provider for an evaluation if you are using medicines regularly to relieve indigestion, or if symptoms persist or become severe.

Points to Remember:

Indigestion can be caused by a condition in the digestive tract such as *gastro-esophageal reflux disease* (GERD), peptic ulcer, gallstones, cancer, or abnormality of the pancreas or bile ducts.

Indigestion and heartburn are different conditions, but a person can have symptoms of both.

To diagnose chronic indigestion your provider may order X-rays, blood or stool tests, and an upper endoscopy with biopsies.

People can often relieve regular indigestion by making some lifestyle changes and decreasing stress, as noted above.

MORE INFO National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse:
<http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/a-z.asp>

Sources:

Digestive Diseases. National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC). Accessed 7/31/09 at <http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/a-z.asp>.

"Evaluation and Management of Dyspepsia," *American Family Physician*, 10/15/99.

"American Gastroenterological Association Medical Position Statement: Evaluation of Dyspepsia." *Gastroenterology*, 1998.

4 FACTS About Backache

By Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAFP

FACT: Back pain can often be avoided. Common back pain is triggered by several factors, including lack of fitness. Regular physical activity is one of the best steps you can take to protect your back. Back-friendly activities include walking, swimming, Pilates, yoga and tai chi; if you have back problems, check with your provider before starting any of these activities.

FACT: Poor posture can cause back pain. Proper body mechanics are important for reducing your risk. For example, use a lumbar support while sitting to reduce strain, or get up and move about to break muscle tension; place a stool under one foot at a time while standing for long periods. Learn how to lift objects correctly and ask for help lifting heavy or awkward objects.

FACT: Back rehabilitation studies show a medium-firm mattress might be better for your back than a firm one. Bedtime ergonomic tips: If you have back pain, try lying on your side in a curled position with a pillow between your legs. If you are prone to backache and sleep on your back, place a pillow or rolled towel under your knees to relieve the pressure from arching your back. Use a pillow that won't angle your neck but helps keep neck and spine aligned.

FACT: Stress can cause back pain. Stress typically produces muscle tension, triggering flare-ups of pain related to back problems. Meditation, deep breathing and relaxation exercises can help relieve stress, improve sleep and reduce back pain.

Source:

Mayo Clinic Wellness Solutions for Back Pain (DVD). Gaiam Media, Inc., 2007.

GOAL LINE Buy gifts that encourage healthy eating, such as a steamer or a food scale. While you're at it, treat yourself, too.

SAFETY SOLUTIONS

Street Smarts

Unfortunately, child abductions have become frequent news items. Fortunately, there are things we can do to decrease the likelihood of children being abducted. Here's what you can do:

Walk children to the bus stop or to school until they've reached age 10; from this age, make sure they walk in groups of 3 or more, preferably with a trusted adult.

Remind your child to remain with a group, stay on sidewalks and walk on main streets at all times. Emphasize that under no circumstances should children deviate from their normal route and walk in a desolate area.

Know the length of time it takes your children to walk to and from school or the bus stop. Immediately check any delay in arrival home.

Keep a current photograph of your child, along with a written description of your child's height, weight, eye and hair color, age and any other identifying attributes (such as scars, glasses, braces, etc.).

Keep custody documentation close at hand. Family members or acquaintances commit over 70% of abductions.

Teach kids not to help strangers who ask for directions or use other "tactics." If a child does not personally know the individual or has not been introduced to that individual by a parent, the individual should be considered a stranger. Teach children to ignore them, then run and find a trusted adult.

Arrive on time to pick up your child. Call an adult if you'll be late so your child will be supervised while waiting.

If your child is missing, call law enforcement immediately as the first hours are the most critical in safely recovering a child. No matter what you've heard, there is no law requiring a waiting period for reporting a missing child younger than 21. After reporting your child missing to local law enforcement, call the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children toll-free at **800-THE-LOST** (1-800-843-5678).

Source:

"Just in Case...Guidelines in case your child might someday be missing." National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2004. Accessed 4/24/09 at <http://www.missingkids.com>

COOK IT RIGHT: Is it done?

Each year, 76 million people in the U.S. become ill from food and of those, nearly 5,000 die, according to the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention.

Before you bite, make sure it's cooked right – especially meats, poultry, and other animal-based foods. Here are food safety recommendations from the USDA:

STEAKS AND ROASTS: Proper cooking kills harmful bacteria on the surface of solid cuts of meat, such as steak, but make sure the internal temperature is at least 145°F.

GROUND MEAT: Avoid eating ground beef that is pink inside. Best internal temperature is at least 160°F.

PORK: Best internal temperature is at least 160°F for medium, 170°F for well done.

POULTRY: Cook poultry to a minimum internal temperature of 165°F.

EGG DISHES: Internal temperature should reach 160°F.

FISH: Cook fin fish until opaque and flaky to an internal temperature of 145°F.

What's the proper way to use a food thermometer?

1. Use an instant-read food thermometer toward the end of cooking time.
2. Place the thermometer in the thickest part of the food, avoiding bone, fat, or gristle.
3. Clean the thermometer with hot, soapy water before and after each use.

Food Safety Education, www.fsis.usda.gov/is_it_done_yet/

Sources:

"Is it done yet? Brochure Text." USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, 9/20/07. Accessed on 7/22/09 at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov>

"Foodborne Illness." CDC, 2005. Accessed on 7/22/09 at http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/foodborneinfections_g.htm#howmanycases.

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EATING SMART

Are You Salt-Savvy?

By Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAFP

If you over-salt your food, you're not alone. About 95% of men and 75% of women in the U.S. regularly consume salt (sodium) in excess of recommended, healthy amounts.

Check the salt-related habits that are true for you:

TRUE FALSE

- I love salty foods such as chips, pickles, olives, ham and bacon.
- I rarely have time to shop for or prepare fresh foods.
- I have not tried using less salt in my cooking.
- I always salt my food at the table.
- I usually don't buy reduced-sodium products.
- I often eat frozen entrees or prepared foods.
- I frequently enjoy take-out or restaurant fare.

If you marked "true" more than once or twice, your sodium habits may be a health risk.

While you need some salt to maintain your body's fluid balance, consuming more than 2,300 milligrams of sodium a day may raise your risk for chronic ailments. In sensitive people, larger amounts often lead to high blood pressure, heart failure, prostate problems, leg swelling and liver or kidney disease. The recommended daily sodium limit for middle-aged and older adults is 1,500.

Take steps to reduce your sodium intake with these tips:

- **Make meals from scratch whenever possible.** Fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, fish, poultry and lean meats are low in sodium.
- **Flavor foods with herbs and spices instead of salt.** Try fresh or dried basil, oregano, cilantro and garlic – or fresh-squeezed lemon juice or flavored vinegar.
- **Check food labels for salt content.** Low-sodium products have fewer than 140 milligrams per serving.
- **Limit use of high-sodium foods and condiments,** such as smoked or pickled products, soy sauce, ketchup, barbecue sauce, soup mixes and tenderizers.
- **When eating out,** order your meal prepared without added salt.

Sources:

"Sodium shakedown." Health, 12/04.

"Dietary guidelines for Americans, 2005. Accessed 7/20/09 at <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines>.

Popular *Gourmet* or *Culinary* Salts

Using small amounts of specialty salts may enhance flavor without adding excess sodium. Some types contain trace amounts of minerals not found in table salt and offer a subtle taste or different texture when added to a dish just before serving. **Grey salt**, **Fleur de Sel**, **Hawaiian sea salt**, **black salt** from India, **herb-enhanced salt**, and **smoked salt** are a few of the interesting varieties.

Sources:

Marq Blanks. Culinary salt—How much do you know about it?" Culinary Escapes. Accessed 7/21/09 at <http://ezinearticles.com/?id=2525366>.

"Culinary salt." Accessed 7/21/09 at <http://www.gourmetsleuth.com/saltguide.htm>.

"Salt: Simple ways to cut back without losing flavor." Cooking Light, 8/09.

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

Black Forest Cheesecake Parfaits

This festive, no-bake treat stays light in calories by replacing regular sugar with a sugar substitute.

1½ cups frozen black cherries, thawed
8 tbsp (½ cup) granular sugar substitute
½ tsp almond extract
½ cup (8 tbsp) chocolate graham cracker crumbs
1½ tbsp cocoa powder
½ tbsp light butter or margarine, melted
8-oz tub-style light cream cheese, room temperature
½ cup light sour cream
1½ cups light whipped topping

1 Select 6 stemmed glasses (e.g., 8-oz. wine glasses).
2 In a small bowl, mix cherries, 2 tbsp sugar substitute and almond extract.
Set aside.

- 3 In another small bowl, mix graham cracker crumbs, 2 tbsp sugar substitute, cocoa powder, and butter. Set aside.
- 4 In a medium mixing bowl, beat cream cheese with an electric mixer until creamy. Add sour cream and remaining sugar substitute and stir until smooth. Fold in whipped topping.
- 5 In the bottom of each glass, place 1 tbsp graham cracker mix. Press down with spoon. Place about 3 tbsp of cream cheese mix on top of each. (Use ½ of the cheese mixture.)
- 6 Divide the cherries among the glasses, placing them on top of the cream cheese layer. Add one more layer of cream cheese. Finish the parfait by topping each with 1 tsp of crumbs.
- Enjoy immediately or refrigerate until ready to serve.

MAKES 6 SERVINGS. PER SERVING:

200 calories | 7g protein | 8g fat | 6g saturated fat | 13mg cholesterol | 24g carbs | 1g fiber | 290mg sodium

GOAL LINE Avoid holiday party platter overload. Eat a nutritious meal before the event and fill up on fruits and vegetables once you arrive.

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EXPERT ADVICE

Best flu protection?

To reduce your chances of getting seasonal influenza or the new H1N1 flu (previously known as swine flu), the CDC suggests you **“Take 3 Steps”**.

1. Get vaccinated. Vaccination protects you against the annual seasonal flu. (At press time, the FDA had approved H1N1 vaccines – ask your provider.) High-risk groups for flu complications from seasonal or H1N1 flu include: people age 65-plus, pregnant women, young children, and people with chronic health conditions such as diabetes or heart and lung disease. People who care for or live with high-risk individuals also

need vaccination.

2. Practice prevention every day. Wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol-based sanitizers. Use a tissue to cover coughs and sneezes. If you get the flu, stay home. Avoid touching your nose, mouth and eyes.

3. Use antiviral flu drugs with your provider's okay. Take within 2 days of symptoms.

Source:

"CDC says 'Take 3' Steps to Fight the Flu." CDC, 3/12/09. Accessed 5/1/09 at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/preventing.htm>.

What is binge drinking?

The CDC defines binge drinking as consuming 5 or more drinks during a single occasion for men or 4 or more drinks during a single occasion for women. Binge drinking and heavy drinking (more than 2 drinks per day on average for men or more than 1 drink per day on average for women) are considered excessive alcohol consumption. Excessive drinking is the third leading lifestyle-related cause of death annually in the U.S.

Binge drinking concerns public health officials because it can lead to increased risk of health problems, including liver disease and unintentional injuries.

Binge drinking should not be confused with alcohol addiction, or alcoholism. Most binge drinkers are not alcohol-dependent, says the CDC.

Health authorities recommend men consume no more than 2 alcoholic drinks a day and women no more than 1 alcoholic drink a day.

If you have more than the recommended daily limit, consider cutting back on alcohol.

Sources:

"Quick Stats: Binge Drinking ." CDC, 8/6/08. Accessed 7/28/09 at http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/quickstats/binge_drinking.htm.

"Alcohol and Public Health." CDC, 9/3/08. Accessed 7/28/09 at <http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/index.htm>.

QUICK STUDIES

Pile your plate with protein-rich plants. A recent study compared a

high-carbohydrate vegetarian diet including eggs, low-fat dairy and whole grains with a diet of low-carbohydrate, high-protein foods rich in plant oils from nuts, soy and other vegetables. After a month, both groups lost nearly 9 pounds, but the second group's cholesterol and blood pressure improved more. *Conclusion:* You may benefit from more plant-based protein and omega-3 oils, including fish.

Source:

The Effect of a Plant-Based Low-Carbohydrate Diet on Body Weight and Blood Lipid Concentrations in Hyperlipidemic Subjects. Archives of Internal Medicine, 4/8/09. Accessed 6/25/09 at <http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/short/169/11/1046>.

Take the pressure off. To help prevent high blood pressure, a 14-year study of 83,882 women ages 27 to 44 identified these 6 lifestyle factors: normal weight; 30 minutes of daily exercise; the DASH diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, a healthy plan with plenty of whole grains, fruits and veggies); limited alcohol consumption; infrequent use of pain relievers; and a daily folic acid supplement. Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard researchers found that participants who had all of the 6 factors had approximately an 80% lower risk of developing hypertension.

(From TH 12.09)

Source:

"Adopting low-risk dietary and lifestyle factors related to lower incidence of high blood pressure." JAMA and Archives Journals, 7/21/09. Accessed 8/11/09 at http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2009-07/jaaj-ald071609.php.